Latrobe Valley Naturalist

May-June 2015 Issue No. 578



Recorded during a mothing survey at Genoa Peak during the LV Field Nats Summer Camp, this is the first photograph taken in Victoria of a live Double-headed Hawk Moth *Coequosa australasiae.* This is the female of the species. (Photo: Ken Harris).

Upcoming events

Bird Group: Thursday 14 May – EA Wetland survey. Meet 9.30am at Morwell River Bridge gate.
May general meeting: Friday 22 May
The importance of fungi in carbon management – Mary Cole
Excursion: Saturday 23 May – Fungi foray at Beech Gully, Mt Erica. Meet 9.30am at Erica Recreation Reserve for 10am departure, to carpool and drive to Mt Erica and later to Eastern Tyers Campground on the South Face Rd.
Botany Group: Saturday 30 May – Grantville Bush with Jenny Rejske. Contact Wendy Savage on 5634 2246.
Bird Group: Tuesday 2 June – Heyfield Wetlands. Meet 9.30am at wetlands carpark.
June general meeting: Friday 26 June
Chatham Islands – David Stickney
Excursion: Saturday 27 June – Edward Hunter Bush Heritage Reserve, Moe. Meet 9.30 at the 2nd carpark on Coalville Rd.
Botany Group: Saturday 4 July – Lichens with Ken Harris, using new brochure. Bring specimens. Location TBA.

Office bearers

President: David Stickney
Secretary: Wendy Savage
Treasurer: David Mules
Publicity Officer: Alix Williams
Magazine editor: Tamara Leitch
Conservation Coordinator: Jackie Tims
Archivist: Marja Bouman
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General meetings

Held at 7:30 pm on the fourth Friday of each month at the Newborough Uniting Church, Old Sale Road Newborough VIC 3825

Note from the editor

Thank you to all the club members who have welcomed me warmly as the new editor of The Naturalist. I am delighted to be given the opportunity to take on this role and I will strive to make as great a contribution to the club as Gill has done over the past 22 years.

Knowing that many of the club's members are keen photographers, one thing I hope to do in future issues is to include more photos. If you have taken any pictures of interesting subjects during excursions, of people getting involved in club activities, or even if you have seen something noteworthy elsewhere in our local area, please email or post your photos to me and I will consider including them in the newsletter.

Tamara Leitch

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2015

Looking back over the last year, it can best be characterised as the year of being the end of an era. The Club was saddened by the passing of Lorna Long in June who was our longest serving Club member. She was awarded a life membership of the Club in 2003 for her outstanding service to the Club in which she held numerous positions on the committee and was a major contributor to the Club's administration of our meetings and excursions. She was a member for more than 50 years and provided a link between our generation and the previous generation of naturalists. Her presence at our committee meetings will be sadly missed.

The other era that has come to an end is that of our editor Gill. She has been our editor of the Naturalist for a record 22 years and has decided to retire. We would like to thank Gill for her remarkable contribution to the Club over an extensive period of time and to wish her well in her retirement. The Club would like to welcome our new editor, Tamara Leitch, who has offered to take over the role and we wish her every success and I hope we will all provide her with the support that she needs to carry out this role. This change also marks a change in the style and delivery of the Naturalist. It will now be a bimonthly publication and will be available in a number of formats including hard copy, an attachment to an email and an update on our web page.

I encourage you all to continue submitting your reports of our meetings and excursions and to include photographs to be included in the new format. We anticipate the new layout will have a new look and will provide opportunities to include colour photographs.

The Club is on a sound footing both with its membership and finances. Our membership is increasing and we still have a high retention rate. We have been fortunate that we have been asked to participate in projects that have financially rewarded the Club. The Club will receive a donation of $2500 per year for conducting a number of bird and plant surveys in the Gippsland Red Gum and Grassy Woodland Project for the Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network over the next two years.

This donation will significantly strengthen our financial position. It will also help to provide some financial assistance to some good causes such as our donation to the Plastic Pollution and Australian Seabirds project led by Jennifer Lavers.

The Club's general meetings covered a good cross-section of travelogues this year including Phil Rayment's presentation on two weeks in the Kimberley, Harold Ross's talk on the Desert Parks Botanical Travelogue and we might include Ken Gosbell's talk on Migratory Flyway Routes about arguably our most travelled species on the planet. Whales are also long distance migrants and Geoff Glare's talk on Whale Watching covered the most common species seen around the coast of Australia.

Topics closer to the Latrobe Valley included a topical talk on the Thomson River fishway at Horseshoe Bend which was supplemented by an excursion to the site the following day. This was our most attended meeting of the year, although it was supported by some Friends of Horseshoe Bend. Other local topics included Matt Bowler's talk on the Lower Latrobe Meander Restoration project, Pam Whiteley's talk on Wildlife Health Surveillance and Marilyn Hewish's talk on Birds of the Long Forest, and we were pleased that Marilyn could join us for a mothing and spotlight evening in Morwell National Park the following night. The talk by David Cantrill on the National Herbarium was also complemented by an excursion to the Victorian Herbarium the following day.

We continued to visit a number of local reserves on our excursions which included Uralla Reserve, Wonthaggi Heathlands, Morwell River Wetlands, Mount Erica and Morwell National Park. Those reserves further away included our trip to Aberfeldy to look at the areas affected by the recent fires, with Geoff Pike. We were also able to visit Heyfield Wetlands and the Herb Guyatt Reserve before visiting Sale Wetlands. Many of these reserves had not been visited by many of our members, and we were joined by the Friends of Venus Bay on our trip to Andersons Inlet.

Our spring camp coincided with the SEANA camp which was held at Portland. Our Club was well represented at the weekend in September and our thanks go to the Portland Field Naturalist Club for a very interesting weekend. Many of our members also attended the ANN camp in Hobart in October. Our summer camp in Mallacoota had one of the best attendances on record for our Club with 37 members attending. I would like to thank our committee members for organising and leading the excursions.

We continue to monitor our attendance records and I am happy to say that our attendance at our general meeting remains constant with an average of over 24 members. The average number of members attending our excursions was 13, which was impacted by some rather inclement weather on some excursion days.

I thank the Club for electing me as your president for a further term. I look forward to working with our committee and members and would like to thank those members who have accepted a further term on your committee. We are going through a remarkable period of change which has been brought about by the digital revolution. This has many benefits and will be highlighted this year by our new look magazine. I hope we can respond and accept that change as inevitable and we can all navigate through this change. The challenge will be to adopt these changes and not lose our fundamental objective to 'protect and enjoy' our environment.

ANN 2014 GET-TOGETHER IN HOBART – Part 1

The eighth gathering of naturalists under the auspices of the Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) took place in Hobart from 18-27 October, hosted in fine style by the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club (TFNC) Inc. The base was The Lea Scout Centre, located in bushland just off the Southern Outlet which links the capital with Kingston. The 86 registered participants, not including the many TFNC members involved, hailed from all eight states and territories except South Australia, with WA (23) and Victoria (36) providing the largest contingents. Ken Harris, Gill Bremner and I represented our club, with Ken being particularly welcomed as a past president of the TFNC.

A truly excellent program of evening talks and activities, meetings, breakfasts and dinners was provided at The Lea, which also accommodated many folk in bunk-houses and bush cabins. All excursions were totally coach-based, with no tag-along vehicles allowed – a practice highly recommended in terms of both maximising contact with leaders and minimising disruptions en route.

The TFNC is one of Australia's oldest natural history groups, having been established in 1904. A history of its first hundred years, *A Century Afield*, was authored by Janet Fenton, a naturalist, writer and artist who grew up in Melaleuca in Tasmania's remote south-west. It was good to see the many links between the present-day club and scientists from institutions such as the University of Tasmania's School of Biological Sciences and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

I must say that the TFNC did an absolutely brilliant job in staging this ten-day event. The planning, organisation and quality of field trips and lectures were superb, so president Kevin Bonham, lead organisers Genevieve Gates, Annabel Carle and the other organising committee members are to be heartily commended. On top of that, Hobart and south-eastern Tasmania turned on great weather for us.

Space limitations prevent me from covering all aspects of the program, so what follows hopefully gives a flavour of selected excursions and talks that I found of particular interest.

Saturday 18th October

Evening talk – Keith Corbett: 'The geological background to the landscapes and ecology of Tasmania'

As a geologist, Keith drew on his expertise to explain why Tasmania's vegetation is as it is. He began by noting that Jurassic dolerite found in the centre and south-east of the state covers approx. 50% of the land area. Older rocks including pre-Cambrian quartzites are found in the north and west. The ten highest peaks are of dolerite, with "organ pipe" cooling columns and scree boulders evident on, for example, Ben Lomond and Mt Wellington. High dolerite columns form sea cliffs on the Tasman Peninsula and southern Bruny Island. The dolerite is to be seen as intrusions through sandstone and Permian mudstone, being exposed following erosion of the top level sandstone. The Russell Falls in Mt Field NP display horizontally layered Permian mudstones.

Keith captured our attention with his observation that Tasmania might well have remained part of Antarctica, rather than becoming part of today's Australia, when Gondwana broke up. The

Australian plate separated from Antarctica late in the break-up process, with the part of the plate to the south of Tasmania adhering to Antarctica.

Sunday 19th October

Field trip – Tasmanian Bushland Gardens, led by Keith and Sib Corbett

These splendid gardens have been established by a group of dedicated volunteers in 20 ha of bushland near Buckland, approx. 50 km north-east of Hobart. The site is centred around a low wooded dolerite hill with an open grassy top. The developed garden section displays groups of plants that grow together in the natural environment. Most groups are those that favour dolerite soils, but some plant sets that grow on mudstone-, granite- or sandstone-derived soils are featured. A beautiful memorial garden commemorates key volunteers, including the late Dr Gretna Weste who devoted some of the last years of her life to the project.

Sunday 19th October

Evening talk – Mark Wapstra: 'Using fairy lanterns to light the forest floor: *Thismia rodwayi* in Tasmania'

Environmental consultant Mark Wapstra engagingly introduced his subject as Tasmania's only "underground flowering plant" – widespread but seldom seen as it grows under leaf litter. The generic name *Thismia* is an anagram of *Smithia*, while the specific *rodwayi* derives from Leonard Rodway who found the specimen used for its description in southern Tasmania, near Hobart, in 1890. The plant has lantern-like fleshy orange flowers, 1-2 cm in length; its pollinator is unknown and fruiting bodies are rarely seen. Lacking chlorophyll, it is technically an epi-parasite, drawing nourishment from a fungus.

Mark explained that *T. rodwayi* is to be found across eastern Australia, from Tasmania up to Queensland, in wet sclerophyll forest. The peak flowering is in October-November. Most other *Thismia* species are found in tropical regions, and there is still much to learn about them.

Phil Rayment

HEYFIELD WETLANDS

The excursion on 29th November began in bright sunlight which heralded the start of our summer. Conditions remained sunny but sultry throughout the day. A number of our members assembled at the Heyfield Wetland Information Centre to start a 3 km walk through a series of wetlands to look for different species of birds, plants and insect life. The information centre overlooks a picturesque lake, is the home of the Neville-Smith Timber Industries display and has a wide range of souvenirs and information on the local region.

One of our first encounters was a group of duck chicks which had attached themselves to a coot. Ken and I were a little ahead waiting for a Buff-banded Rail which had been seen flying into some dense grass. While we were waiting for it to emerge we decided to retrace our steps to investigate and found the ducklings with their real mother – a female Chestnut Teal. Perhaps it



Whistling Kite at Heyfield Wetlands
(Photo: Ken Harris)

was an example of imprinting but there are many examples of young birds being fed by different species. When we returned, we inadvertently flushed the rail again and had to wait several minutes for it to emerge.

Another incident which caught my attention was a fracas between a number of Purple Swamphens. These birds always seem to coexist peacefully so were uncertain what prompted this dispute.

We had a pleasant lunch on the balcony of the information centre watching a group of young swallows being fed by the parent birds. The morning ended with a respectable total of 47 species of birds.

After lunch we proceeded to Coongulla where there had been reported sightings of Channel-billed Cuckoos and Eastern Koels.

We were invited by John Gwyther to his property 'North Point', pleasantly situated on the north shore of Lake Glenmaggie at Coongulla. The afternoon visit began with a search on the shore of the lake for a pair of Channel-billed Cuckoos that had been reported on his property. They were not present today but we were able to have several brief views of another cuckoo – the Eastern Koel. We had views of both sexes (the male is black and the female is brown with plentiful white spots) and were continually serenaded by their slow 'Kooeel' call. Both these species are well south of their normal distribution. The presence of both species here is interesting, because they are both summer breeding migrants from Indonesia, and leads to speculation on the availability of their host species further north.

The property was equipped with a fully functional air strip and we had a pleasant walk along the runway identifying some of the untouched plants beside the airstrip. Some of the plants included widespread native kangaroo grass, uncommon Blue Grass Lily (*Caesia calliantha*), more common Yellow Rush Lily (*Tricoryne elatior*), and pervasive Common Centaury (*Centaurium erythraea*) which Ken described as cosmopolitan because it is uncertain whether it originated in Europe or was here before European settlement. There was also a large patch of Slender Rock Fern (*Cheilanthes tenuifolia*).



White-faced Heron at Heyfield Wetlands
(Photo: Ken Harris)



The purpose of our walk was to look for a Diamond Firetail which had been seen recently. Although unsuccessful, we did find a Jacky Winter as it flitted to its nest which was precariously constructed in the fork of a tree.

The day ended very pleasantly with a cup of tea and biscuits very generously supplied by our host. The disappointment of not finding both species of cuckoo was compensated by John's company and hospitality and our thanks go to John for a very pleasurable afternoon.

David Stickney

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo at Heyfield Wetlands (Photo: Ken Harris)

Bird list for Heyfield Wetlands ***provided by David Mules***

Australian Wood Duck	Chestnut Teal	Pacific Black Duck
Hardhead	Spotted Dove	Great Cormorant
White-faced Heron	Sacred Ibis	Whistling Kite
Purple Swamphen	Buff-banded Rail	Dusky Moorhen
Eurasian Coot	Galah	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella	Eastern Rosella	Laughing Kookaburra
Sacred Kingfisher	Superb Fairy-wren	Yellow Thornbill
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Spotted Pardalote	Striated Pardalote
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	White-plumed Honeyeater	Noisy Miner
Red Wattlebird	New Holland Honeyeater	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Rufous Whistler	Grey Shrike-thrush	Australian Magpie
Pied Currawong	Grey Fantail	Willie Wagtail
Little Raven	Magpie-lark	Australian Reed-warbler
Little Grassbird	Welcome Swallow	Common Blackbird
Common Starling	Common Myna	Red-browed Finch
House Sparrow	European Goldfinch	

Additional birds at North Point (Lake Glenmaggie)

Musk Lorikeet	Eastern Koel	Satin Bowerbird
Little Wattlebird	Varied Sittella	Jacky Winter
Australasian Pipit		

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING 20.04.2015

Finance

Cash Management Trading Account $3065.04, Term Deposit $14,386.10

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

Club membership renewal is now due.

Botany microscope: to be discussed at botany microscope workshop on 2 May.

SEANA Spring Camp 2015: To be held at Donald 25-27 September. This clashes with another event in Donald, so those wishing to attend should book accommodation early.

SEANA Spring Camp 2016: Meeting held in Sale on 17 April. Camp to be held on 14-17 Oct at The Laurels Function Centre at Sale's Greenwattle Racecourse. Venue hire will be $1000; LVFNC contributing $250 of $500 deposit. Duarts of Maffra catering for dinners at $27-33 per head. Attendees to arrange their own accommodation, as well as meals for breakfast and lunch. Risk management policies – committee members to read the documents to be discussed.

Club spring camp at Warby Ranges: 4-7 September 2015. Staying at Painters Island Caravan Park in Wangaratta. Please contact Wendy if you plan to attend, and indicate what sort of accommodation you would like. Alix is making enquiries into Michael Ramsay's 'Bronzewing Birding Services', which runs birdwatching trips in the area.

Data projector: No spare bulb to be purchased as it will cost $230 and existing globe should last 2000 hours. Need to sort out adjustments for Macs/PCs to obtain better quality projection.

Walkie-talkie battery charger: David took charger to Battery Power, where they suggested we need a new one and should consider a car charger, or plug allowing charging from mains or car.

Lichen brochure: Copies to be sent to libraries etc as required. Not done yet. Ballarat FNC has ordered 30 copies.

EPA Hazelwood Recovery Program: David on behalf of the club will be conducting monthly water sampling at Mathison Park, and possibly other places.

Club has been nominated by Megan Hughes (WGCMA) for the Landcare (West Gippsland) Green Carpet Awards to be held Friday 24 April.

Conservation matters

Blue Rock Dam: Jackie read material supplied by Julie Parker and considered it not sufficiently relevant to our purpose to put in an objection to the proposed changes to boating restrictions. Signage about local flora and fauna is being erected along new tracks by Tanjil Valley Landcare and our club will be listed as a contact for more information.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The club welcomes Lynne Woodbridge from Traralgon, Rose Mildenhall from Hazelwood North, Kaye Trainor and Martin O'Brien from Richmond, Eric and Margaret Smith from Shady Creek, Rosemary Kidd from Boolarra, Joelle Champert and Jay Duncan from Yinnar South and Jason Foster from Mirboo North. We wish you all a long and happy association with us.

Guest speaker for May

Mary Cole, mycologist & plant pathologist

Dr Mary Cole is an internationally recognised mycologist who has worked in the field for more than 30 years.

Mycorrhizal fungi act to bind and give structure to soils. Recent research has shown that a by-product of fungi has the capacity to hold far more carbon for longer in the soil than does humus.

Common cultivation and chemical application practices lead to loss of the fungal component in soils. Changing practices help to maintain the fungal web, capture carbon and enhance the water holding capacity, populations of soil microbes, and the nutrient density of plants.

Guest speaker for June

David Stickney

David, our Club President, is a keen birdwatcher and accomplished photographer.

His talk will cover a trip to the Chatham, Bounty and Antipodes Islands located about 800 km east of New Zealand. This region is described as the Galapagos of the Southern Ocean because some 40 species of seabirds breed there, about 11% of the world's seabird population. The Erect-crested Penguin (pictured) is found only on these islands.



Latrobe Valley Naturalist is the official publication of the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalist Club Inc. The Club subscription includes the "Naturalist".

Brief contributions and short articles on any aspect of natural history are invited from members of all clubs. Articles, including those covering Club speakers and excursions, would typically be around one A4 side in length, should not exceed 1,000 words, and may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Photos should be sent as an attachment and be a maximum of 1 megabyte in size.

Responsibility for the accuracy of information and opinions expressed in this magazine rests with the author of the article.

Contributions should be addressed to:

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Deadline for articles to be considered for inclusion in the next issue (July/August): 10 July 2015

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